

LEAVE
US
ALONE



NO PIGS IN OUR CLUBS

On Friday evening, January 19th, agents from the Louisiana Office of Alcohol and Tobacco Control, the 8th District New Orleans Police Department, and the Louisiana State Police raided four strip clubs in New Orleans' French Quarter, suspending the clubs' liquor licenses, shuttering their doors, and confiscating internal surveillance footage. The raids appear in tandem with the City Council and City Planning Commission's (CPC) recent production and upcoming review of an "Adult Live Performance Venues Study," (ALPV) which recommends both separating and limiting the number of strip clubs in the Vieux Carre Entertainment District, the pedestrian mall section of Bourbon Street.

The raids have continued into late January, bringing the total number of clubs suspended to eight. The clubs in question are: Dixie Divas, Hunk Oasis, Rick's Cabaret, Rick's Sporting Saloon, Barely Legal, Scores, Stilettos, and Temptations. Several of the clubs remain closed indefinitely; a ninth, Lipstixxs, closed just days before the raids. A hearing on their various liquor license suspensions, including charges brought against the clubs, is slated for the February 1st. **These raids have left hundreds of people without income overnight.** Sparse information is being released, even to club lawyers, on what violations prompted the suspensions.

On February 6th, The CPC will hold a public hearing on the ALPV Study and the proposal to limit Bourbon Street strip clubs' ability to open, stay open, or re-open. The study recommends that clubs be closed, due to their "secondary negative effects," though it presents no hard data in support of this claim. Mayor Mitch Landrieu's office placed attorney Scott Bergthold on a \$15,000 retainer to advise on the ALPV Study. His firm, adultbusinesslaw.com, litigates against adult businesses on behalf of cities and counties. The local press praises his involvement and continually allege that strip clubs harbor human trafficking. Friday's raids, as with the October 2015 raids called "Operation Trick or Treat," uncovered not one instance of human trafficking or the presence of underage workers.

A recent ban against 18-20 year old women working as strippers led to a (still-ongoing) Jane-Doe lawsuit from three women after losing their jobs. Like the citywide measures, the statewide age ban was drafted "to protect young women." **During Friday's raids, strippers and wait-staff described being detained and isolated from one another and their possessions while having their IDs run for prior arrests and outstanding warrants and their photographs taken without consent in their work attire.**

Those who resisted were handcuffed and many described being ridiculed, degraded, and molested by cops. In response to stripper's protests of the conduct of all-male officers during the raids, they laughed and replied "You lost your right to decency when you became a stripper." This sentiment is not new to us, as it's the response we get from many people in our lives.

As Belli Research Institute writes, "Stigma exists in a nexus of capitalist exploitation of bodies, cis-hetero-patriarchy and white supremacy, not in a vacuum of morals as it is commonly treated."

These raids occur on the eve of New Orleans' 300th anniversary and a recent New York Times award of "The #1 Place to Visit" in a nationwide travel guide after the city and business district spent six million dollars for a "makeover for Bourbon Street."

Like countless other historic red light districts, we know that these re-developments act as rationale for wiping out the most undesirable and marginal people and traditions of a city.

The ongoing attack against sex workers in strip clubs, founded on so-called anti-trafficking efforts, furthers the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work.

Our struggle for autonomy won't be built on throwing street sex workers under the bus, as the State and pathetic journalists like Kevin Litten hope for when they back us into corners and demand we "distinguish" ourselves from illegal forms of sex work.

We know that "actual victims of trafficking are often most harmed by the work of anti-traffickers who rely on police and State intervention." We know that our dressing room is the only place our abusers are not able to follow us, unless of course they are the police. The networks of support, care, information sharing, and conspiring are only heightened by these raids. An overwhelming amount of independent contractors who thrive in sporadic and transient work environments are freely exclaiming "We are fighting back!" "We won't go down without a fight!" "It's all of us against the police!"

The Bourbon Alliance of Responsible Entertainers (BARE) was formed this past fall by strippers to advocate for themselves against the city's escalating misconduct, misrepresentation, and mistreatment of nightlife workers. BARE is organized and led by strippers, and includes allies in law, public health, labor organizing, and media.

A petition is circulating now, which will be presented to the New Orleans City Council and City Planning Commission with the following demands:

1. A future where entertainers may choose where to work, including worker-owned clubs.
2. An Entertainers' right to seek gainful work, including in entertainment.
3. Entertainers' autonomy as independent contractors: our right to free speech and to gather freely.
4. The right to a safe working environment and the security of our contracts.

As carnival season picks up to full swing, messages of resilience highlight the absurdity of Bourbon street without strippers and overpriced drinks.

An absurdity like Mardi Gras without masks or parades – a Bourbon street without strippers is no bons temps at all! If we can't dance on Mardi Gras, there will be more than palms burning on Ash Wednesday.

AGAINST STIGMA, NOT SEX WORK! AGAINST THE POLICE!

– Anonymous Strippers in New Orleans